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Cyber Attacks Present 'Huge' Threat, Gates Says

By Elaine Wilson

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Nov. 17, 2010 - Leaders are taking steps to bring defense industrial and domestic partners under an umbrella of protection from cyber attacks, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said.

"There is a huge future threat and there is a considerable current threat [from cyber attacks]," Gates said here yesterday during a question-and-answer session at the Wall Street Journal's CEO Council. "That's just a reality we all face."

The DOD already has implemented effective protections for ".mil," he said, and is working with its partners in the defense industrial base to offer them similar protections.

Leaders also would like to extend this protection to the government's domestic side, Gates said, noting the importance of the National Security Agency to the nation's defense against cyber threats and attacks.

"The only defense the United States has ... against nation states and other potential threats in the cyber world is the National Security Agency," he said. "You cannot replicate the National Security Agency for domestic affairs. There isn't enough money, there isn't enough time, and there isn't enough human talent."



Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, right, responds to a question during an interview with Gerald F. Seib, the Wall Street Journal's executive Washington editor, during the newspaper's CEO Council event in Washington, D.C., Nov. 16, 2010. The interview focused on upcoming budget cuts within the department. Seib also is the Wall Street Journal's assistant managing editor. DOD photo by R. D. Ward (Click photo for screen-resolution image); [high-resolution image](#) available.

The challenge, however, is offering the government's domestic side access to NSA while also taking into account concerns for privacy and civil liberties, Gates said.

With this issue in mind, President Barack Obama recently approved a memorandum of understanding based on recommendations from Gates and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano. The MOU creates a Homeland Security Department cell within NSA, Gates said, with the authority to task NSA, but using its own attorneys to ensure privacy and civil liberties are kept at the forefront.

The cell offers a domestic security agency an opportunity to reach into NSA in a "real-time way" for protection, Gates said.

"My hope is over time that this will lead to better protections for both .gov and .com," he said.

Gates also touched on the need for "real" competition in regard to acquisition, a topic that dovetails into his initiative to slash \$100 billion from the DOD's overhead -- or the "tail side" -- and reinvest savings into the "tooth side" of the department.

"Too often competition in Washington is, everyone wins," the secretary said. "That's not my idea of competition. My idea of competition in the acquisition arena is winner takes all."

"I think the more we can do this, and the more we can cause industry, particularly on relatively low-technology-risk programs, to share the risk with the government in terms of timeliness and costs, the better off the taxpayers will be," Gates said. "And at the end of the day, I think, the better off business will be."